District Review Report
Final

School District No. 48 (Howe Sound)

March 31 – April 2, 2003

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Don Truscott, Superintendent, School District No. 35 (Langley)

School District #48 Howe Sound
School District Review Report

104-06616/

District Name:	Howe Sound
District Number:	48
Superintendent:	Dr. Linda Rossler
Date of Visit:	March 30 – April 2, 2003
Team Chair:	Don Truscott, Superintendent SD 35, Langley
Team Members:	Juanita Edinger, Principal, SD 54, Bulkley Valley Catharine Gilmour, Teacher, Math Coordinator, SD 37, Delta Judy Halbert, Ministry of Education Hattie Hogeterp, Parent, SD 35, Langley Sherri Mohoruk, Assistant Superintendent, SD 36, Surrey

Context

Howe Sound is a district of 4,543 students in 13 schools in the communities of Squamish, Whistler, Pemberton and D'Arcy. The communities are diverse but share a common belief in the importance of meeting the needs of all their students. The district operates under a decentralized model. Recently there have been modifications to this model; however, the district continues to support school-based decision making in the allocation of some resources.

The Howe Sound District Review is one of twenty school district reviews being completed in the year 2002-2003.

The purpose of the District Review is to provide feedback and recommendations to the district, the Ministry of Education, and the public regarding the school district's work in improving student achievement by:

- reviewing district and school achievement data
- reviewing the district accountability contract and school plans to improve student achievement
- making recommendations to the Board and the Minister about improving student achievement; and
- identifying promising practices that will assist other districts and schools in their efforts to improve student achievement.

Summary of Process

Review Team Activities:

- On the first evening the review team met with the following district representatives:

the Board chair, the president of the HSTA, the president of the HSPVPA, the vice-chair of DPAC and four members of the senior staff.

- Senior staff provided an overview of the district accountability contract and the district educational plan.

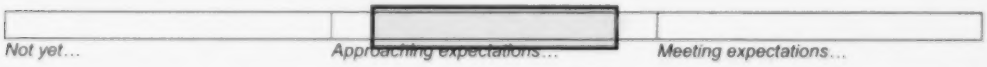
- The team met with representative groups including principals, vice principals, teachers, parents, support staff, Aboriginal support workers, students and trustees at 10 schools: Howe Sound Secondary, Pemberton Secondary, Whistler Secondary, Brackendale Elementary, Garibaldi Highlands Elementary, Myrtle Philip Community School, Don Ross Secondary, Signal Hill Elementary, Stawamus Elementary, Valleycliffe Elementary.
- The team met with representatives of the Aboriginal Community, CUPE, DPAC and senior staff.
- At the conclusion of its visit the review team provided a draft report to senior staff, employee representatives, parents, community members and trustees.

Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. Goals:
   Improving districts have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in clear goals for improving student learning.

   - Goals are focused on improving student learning but are not clearly defined.

2. *Rationale:*
   Improving districts have a thorough and connected set of reasons based on evidence for the selection of their student achievement goals.



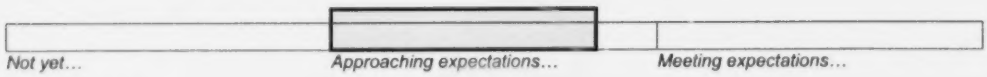
   - Some schools are able to articulate a data based rationale.

3. *Data:*
   Improving districts are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school and district / provincial data. The analysis of this evidence has informed the selection of the district goals.

   - The district is beginning to use data in a conscious and explicit way e.g. early success data.

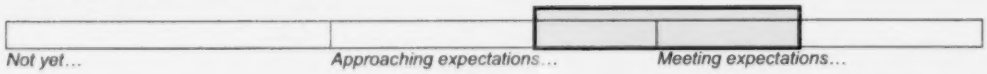
- Some schools are using data to inform instruction.
- The district and the schools are not yet using student performance data in a consistent, meaningful way to improve student achievement.

4. *Strategies:*
Improving districts have a well-organized, focused improvement plan in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



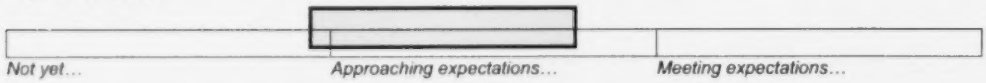
- Schools are implementing a number of strategies.
- Strategies are not always linked to specific goals.
- Strategies to improve the achievement of Aboriginal students are not clearly understood or shared across the district.

5. *Structures:*
Improving districts have aligned structures – resources, time, organizations – to get the results they want. This includes effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



- The district has made a conscious effort to align resources in support of its goals.
- The focus groups are providing a valuable structure for teacher collaboration.
- Some schools have made structural changes to support student learning.

6. *Results:*
Improving districts get improved student learning results – at the classroom, school and district levels.

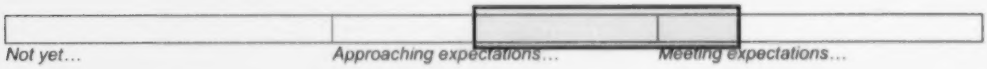


- The Early Success Initiative has demonstrated the effectiveness of assessing for learning, providing direct intervention based on the assessment and monitoring the results.
- The district is beginning to develop classroom based assessment tools.

7. *Communication:*
Improving districts communicate and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made.

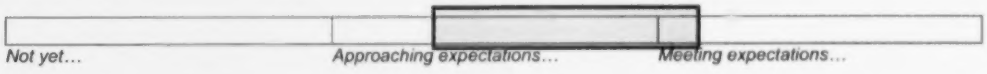
- The district has a number of effective communication strategies that will be helpful in informing the public about student achievement.

8. *Teamwork*: Schools and District
Improving districts have a dynamic and interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school district directions are both valued.



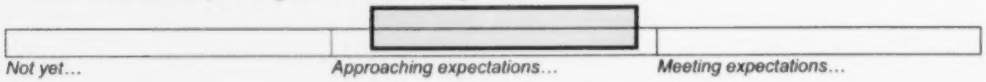
- The district values the unique needs of schools and is working hard to align district and school goals.

9. *Teamwork*: Parents and District
Improving districts work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, on improving student learning.



- School Planning Councils are established, training has been provided and SPCs are currently involved in the development of school plans for 2003/2004.
- Schools are making an effort to include all parents and are to be encouraged to continue every effort in this regard.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork:*
Improving districts are led by district leaders with a clear vision for and commitment to school improvement and improving student achievement. Principals, vice principals, teacher, parent and student leadership is encouraged and systematically developed – with a focus on improving student learning.



- The focus groups are providing leadership opportunities for principals, vice principals and teachers.
- The district values the important leadership role of principals and vice principals.
- The early success initiative promotes shared leadership.

Strengths

- Focus groups in key goal areas are serving as a catalyst for improving student achievement by supporting teacher leadership and collaboration across schools. Many teachers and principals express a genuine appreciation for this district initiative and professional opportunity.
- Commitment to the early success initiative has resulted in improved achievement for a number of at risk learners. The district is to be commended for its on-going leadership in this area.
- The introduction of the Outreach Program and the international program – both designed to expand the learning opportunities for students in this district.
- The coordinated and integrated approach to meeting the needs of special learners.
- The commitment of all partners in the Howe Sound School District to providing the best possible learning experiences for their children.
- The openness of educators to learn from each other, to try new approaches, and to share promising ideas.
- The range and variety of communication strategies.
- The partnerships that the district has developed with the community that benefits learners, e.g. breakfast programs, work experience sites, foundations programs.

Promising Practices

- Creative ways of communicating with parents, e.g. homework hotlines, the homework page on school websites
- Provision of parent teacher interviews on the reserve.
- Alternate Program located on the reserve.
- Development of district assessments in writing and reading.

Recommendations

The district has recently started to work with the concept of Howe Sound as a professional learning community. The team acknowledges the appropriateness of this concept as a framework for their improvement work. The team believes that to make a genuine difference in student achievement, there are three major areas that the district needs to address:

1. Goals

   Clear goals directly linked to student achievement will provide a shared sense of direction and increased coherence among the many initiatives the district has undertaken. The team recommends that the district:

   a. Make explicit the goals for improving student achievement. Goals at both the district and the school level need to be clearly focused on student achievement. Goals need to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely.
   b. Reduce and clarify goals. The number and complexity of goals in the current planning documents can lead to fragmentation and confusion.
   c. Continue to make early success a priority. There is strong evidence that progress is being made.

2. Teamwork

The focus groups are providing a good starting point for the district to work as a team on improving student achievement in key areas. This structure is working particularly well at the elementary level. The team recommends that the district :

a. Work with secondary principal-teacher leader teams to develop collaborative structures and strategies focused on improving student achievement.
b. Work with the Aboriginal communities to develop a cohesive strategy to improve student achievement in all parts of the district.

3. Data

The district recognizes the importance of student performance data. Some schools are using classroom and school assessment data to develop baselines and plan for improvement. The team recommends that the district:

a. Continue to focus on using performance standards, classroom, school and district based assessments in addition to provincial data sources.
b. Work with schools to develop simple systems for collecting, organizing, and using data in a meaningful way to set goals, inform instruction, set targets, and monitor results.

Priorities

To maximize the educational benefits for students, to ensure the effective implementation of the school planning cycle, and to bring a clear focus for the district's work on improving student achievement, the team identifies the following as priorities:

1. Revise the current accountability contract to ensure clarity. The accountability contract is the district plan to improve student achievement. To help focus the district's efforts and to build understanding among all partners, this plan should include:
   a. A few (2-3) clear goals focused on student achievement.
      i. The goals should address the learning needs of the lowest achieving students with a data-based rationale for the selection of the goals. School, district, and provincial data should determine the selection of goals.
   b. Specific performance targets for short and long-term improvement.
      i. Avoid using provincial averages as a target.
      ii. Determine targets based on a commitment to continuous improvement.
   c. Specific instructional strategies that will be most effective in achieving your goals.
   d. The evidence that the district will collect and analyze to monitor progress toward the goals.

2. The district template for school plans should be revised to include:
   a. A few (1-2) clear goals focused on improving student achievement.
   b. A data based rationale for the selection of the goal. The goals should address the learning needs of the lowest achieving students.
   c. Specific performance targets.

d. The evidence (classroom, school, district, and provincial data) that the school will select to monitor progress.

Conclusion:

The district is well poised to make significant improvements in the achievement of all their students. The dedication, commitment, and professionalism of the leadership team, teachers, and support staff are commendable. The positive involvement of parents and community members is a strength of this district. The strong support of the Board of School Trustees was evident throughout the review process.